

**Remarks by Michael Casserly, Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools
At
Press Conference on Urban NAEP 2009
Science Results
February 24, 2011
Boston**

Thank you. I am Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools. I am pleased to join this distinguished panel this morning.

Before I begin, I want to thank David Gordon and Cornelia Orr and their team at the National Assessment Governing Board; and Jack Buckley and Peggy Carr and their team at the National Center for Education Statistics.

It is an honor to work with you on this important project. Thank you for the great job you do.

I also want to take a second to summarize why we initiated the trial urban district assessment over ten years ago.

1. We—as urban school systems—wanted to make it crystal clear that we were fully committed to the highest academic standards for our children.
2. We wanted to be able to compare ourselves individually and collectively with each other and the nation.
3. Finally, we wanted a common way to gauge our progress and evaluate our reforms in ways that the current 50 state assessment system does not allow.

I am repeating these reasons today because people often forget how serious we are about improving student achievement in our urban schools.

I am pleased that three of our cities scored at national averages on the new fourth-grade science assessment: Austin, Jefferson County, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Austin, moreover, scored at national averages in the eighth grade.

And it is worth noting that a number of other cities scored above large city averages, including the three districts I just mentioned plus Miami-Dade County, and San Diego and Boston.

Overall, however, it is clear our scores are low and we take responsibility for that. But the data on this new assessment provide us with an important baseline on which we can build.

I would note that we are about as far behind national averages on the 2009 science assessment as we were when we started the reading and math assessments in 2002 and

2003, respectively, but we have been able to narrow the gap with the nation by about one-third between those baseline years and 2009.

With equal amounts of focus and determination, I am confident that we will narrow our science gaps as well.

I would make two quick points.

One, we are just finishing a major study of the alignment of current state standards and the NAEP 2005 frameworks in science. The data show that the match between the state standards across the country and NAEP was often as low as 10 percent.

What this told us was that too many of our schools could be teaching almost anything and calling it science. If we cannot decide what is important to be teaching about science, then low scores should come as little surprise not only in the cities but nationwide.

Two, and this may come as a surprise to many, but there really is no national science education strategy that has any resonance at the local level despite our rhetorical concerns about the country's international competitiveness. I don't know many of our superintendents would be able to tell you what our national science education strategy is.

We have some grant programs, some curriculum, and some interagency agreements—and much of it is very good—but we do not have no national strategy to which our school systems could align their work.

I would take this moment to call for the acceleration in the development of national science education standards. Without them and a strategy for moving forward, I fear the nation may never move beyond its incessant handwringing about our international science preeminence.

Obviously, we are not satisfied with our new baseline data. Our results are too low. We know we need to accelerate. And we know that our gaps are too wide.

But these NAEP data give us the tools we need to ask hard questions about our instructional practices. We are conducting ground-breaking instructional work in these cities. And these new results give us the basis for expanding our reforms beyond reading and math.

And that's the point behind all the numbers. It is why we volunteered in the first place. So we could tell what was working and what wasn't. So we could raise the quality of public education in our Great Cities. So we could give our kids—the kids that America too often overlooks—a shot at the American dream. And NAEP is helping us do that.

Thank you.